

COLONIAL NEWSLETTER

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◇ AUCTORI PLEBIS ◇

The Auctori Plebis is a token of English origin, which from its resemblance to the coins of Connecticut, is by many classed with the issues of that State. We are in ignorance as to its maker, but as the piece is represented in a book of engravings of English tokens, entitled "The Virtuoso's Companion," published in England in 1796, we consider the place of its origin satisfactorily established, and it was probably struck for use in America.

--- Sylvester S. Crosby
"The Early Coins of America", p. 342.



Enlarged illustration of the AUCTORI PLEBIS
from "The Virtuoso's Companion", Page 54.



Sequential page 475

THE AUCTORI PLEBIS TOKEN & RELATED PIECES

(TN-50)

● from Charles V. Duncan; Modesto, California

Among the coins and tokens listed in the Colonial section of Yeoman's popular GUIDEBOOK are several about which very little is known. Of these, positive information about the AUCTORI PLEBIS token is perhaps the most elusive. And of its several variations (which do not appear in the GUIDEBOOK) even less is known.

Even 100 years after its publication, most serious collectors have only Crosby's short paragraphs in his EARLY COINS OF AMERICA on which to rely. More depth and accuracy is found in a study by Howard H. Kurth in the September 1943 issue of the NUMISMATIC REVIEW, but it is not available to many collectors today. Perhaps a listing of these pieces together with a few facts and considerable speculation will be of interest to CNL Patrons.



Bust Right
Blank Reverse



Bust Left
Normal Reverse

[Both slightly enlarged]

The obverse of the regular AUCTORI PLEBIS (A-P) token greatly resembles the draped bust left Connecticut coppers of 1787. Striking similarity is obvious in the bust design and in the arrangement of punctuation and rosettes --- the same as Miller's 33 series. Note also the similarity of size, alloy, quality of strikes, and general overall appearance. The weight, however, in the 110-120 gr. range, tends to be lower than most Connecticut coppers. The legend AUCTORI PLEBIS must have been inspired by AUCTORI CONNEC, and of course the reverse legends are simply different abbreviations of the same phrase. Little wonder our earliest collectors considered the regular A-P token a part of the Connecticut series.

But in 1875 Crosby revealed he had discovered a line drawing of the A-P token in a book of illustrations of English tokens titled THE VIRTUOSO'S COMPANION. Since the book was published January 14, 1796 he concluded that this token was manufactured prior to 1796 in England. While the date assumption was quite obviously correct, the presumption of proof of English manufacture seems questionable.

The book offers no description of the tokens listed -- only the illustrations, most of which are English trade tokens. One clue is found in the index:

HALFPENNIES.			
▶ Abergavenny	o. A Cask	r. A Bunch of Grapes; s. J. Powell, &c.	12
American	o. A Head, s. Auctori Plebis	r. Britannia, &c.	54
Appledore	o. A Lion and a Lamb	r. A Windmill	10
Aylsham	o. Arms, Supporters, &c.	r. Feathers	110

The listing "American" is probably why Crosby said (p.342) "It was probably struck for use in America". The author may or may not have intended to exclude all but English-made tokens; he may or may not have been accurate in all of his listings if such was his intention.

A possible indication of English manufacture is found by comparing the reverses of three English trade tokens carrying dates of 1793 and 1794 and designed by English die-maker Wyon. Though the reverse (and obverse) legends are different, the seated figure left with globe and anchor on these trade tokens is nearly identical to the reverse of the regular A-P token. One is obviously a copy of the other, and since the trade tokens are more carefully done, we are led to believe the A-P reverse is the copy. But the trade tokens are of much better manufacture, all well struck with lettered edges, discouraging any thought that the same manufacturer might have produced the A-P token as well.

In fact, the crude striking of the A-P token, together with its early development of heavy die-cracks on the reverse, seems far more similar to the crude strikes of other known American struck coins of that era. Consider for comparison some of the American pieces known to have been made in England, such as the Talbot Allum & Lee and the Kentucky (which also appears in the VIRTUOSO'S COMPANION).

Some of the best condition examples of the A-P token have been found in old English collections, it is said. But lest we rely too heavily on this evidence, it must also be considered that some of the best preserved early U.S. coins have also come out of old English collections. There were simply more collectors of coins in England than America in those early days.

The legend suggests American manufacture. Possible translations are "By authority of the common people", or "By the power of the common people". The reverse obviously abbreviates "Independence and Liberty". The token would have been subject to treasonous interpretation should circulation in England have been attempted at that time. It still could have been manufactured in England for export to America, a conclusion Mr. Kurth seemed to favor in his article.

In the period of 1787-1795 during which the A-P token must have been made, a number of mints operated in America capable of manufacture of this piece, not to mention counterfeiters of everything up to and including Spanish milled dollars. The stiff penalties imposed on counterfeiters could have inspired the A-P token

as an evasion piece, a practice known in America and more prevalent in England. "Evasions" were pieces similar to genuine coins, but with legends deliberately re-worded to evade counterfeiting laws. The relative light weight is also typical of evasions.

In the opinion of the writer, logic seems to favor the probability of American manufacture. The passing years diminish the chances of ever determining the question to a certainty. But perhaps new methods of study will show the letters of the legend to be identical to some known coin --- perhaps even one of the Connecticut pieces it so closely resembles. In any event, the intention for use in America seems certain, and the tokens position as a part of American "Colonial" coinage seems secure.

If intended as an evasion, we cannot rely too much on the date of 1787 on the reverse as being the date of manufacture. A related variation is even dated 1736! But similarity to 1787 Connecticut coppers and the illustration published in 1796 limits the possibilities to the period between 1787 and 1795.

Only one obverse die and one reverse die was used in the production of the regular A-P token. The reverse die seems to have cracked quickly. As a result, the only variation found is in the development of die-cracks on the reverse. The GUIDEBOOK photo shows the arc-like crack from the top of the globe to the head of the seated figure. There is corresponding weakness in the bust on the obverse as the die deteriorates. It is doubtful if a very large number of impressions could have been made. This writer concurs with Mr. Kurth in believing the regular A-P token to be "much scarcer than generally supposed", perhaps somewhere in the R-4 range (population estimated at 76 to 200 specimens).

Far rarer are the variations with bust to the right and either blank reverses or the 1736 Hispaniola reverses. Crosby had seen two specimens with Hispaniola reverse and had only heard of two blank reverse pieces. A New Netherlands Coin Co. auction in 1958 included two of the variations, including a Hispaniola reverse with the "3" double-struck so badly that the date appeared as "17336". Also, in 1958, Bowers and Ruddy Galleries sold a Hispaniola reverse at \$50.00; at the same time they listed a VF Continental dollar at \$95.00. At the present time it is known that one collector owns four different variations, all bust right. Two are Hispaniola reverses, and two have blank reverses. Another collector has a bust right uniface piece matching one of the aforementioned collector specimens. Incidentally, Crosby assumed the reverses of the blank-reverse pieces had been worn away by "attrition". Actual inspection of the pieces shows that the reverses were never struck. Information from CNL Patrons as to the location of other examples of these variations -- and photographs -- would be appreciated. In the absence of information on other specimens, we assume that all are of R-8 rarity.

All of the known variations are rather poorly struck, and even the regular A-P

token is seldom found with an appearance justifying a grade much above VF.

The variations are even more puzzling than the regular token. There is considerably less resemblance to the Connecticut coppers. The bust on one of the bust right uniface specimens somewhat resembles George I on some of William Wood's ROSA AMERICANA issues, though certainly not an exact copy. And, the legend letters are of similar style, but larger.....

● ● Editor's Note:

Mr. Duncan's article concludes on a distinct note of incompleteness and it is his hope that his efforts will serve as a start on a complete rethinking of the AUCTORI PLEBIS subject. The observations of our Patrons will be appreciated - and your help is needed, particularly in obtaining photographs of the various specimens and varieties bearing the AUCTORI PLEBIS legend. If you can help in this search please contact ye Editor.

Also - our special thanks to Edward R. Barnsley and the Kress Library section of the Baker Library, Harvard University for the illustration of the AUCTORI PLEBIS from "The Virtuoso's Companion".



WAS CONNECTICUT 101-G.2 FIRST ILLUSTRATED IN THE YEAR 1860?

● from Edward R. Barnsley

(TN-51)

In MILLER'S CONNECTICUT LISTING UPDATED, (CNL, March 1964, P.37), I illustrated the eleven Connecticut dies lithographed by Lewis N. Rosenthal for the first edition of NUMISMATIC MANUAL, 1859. When the second and third editions of this pioneer work were issued in 1860 and 1865, respectively, the author added a twelve page Supplement with its own Introduction and Index as well as a new plate, Plate XX, containing chromoliths of 35 more Early American dies. One of these coins marked Figure 9 is described in the text as being a 1787 Tory Copper, "While the obverse is the same as the English half penny of the date it bears, the reverse is of the general issue of the Vermont coppers."

First, there were no regal British halfpence dated 1787, and secondly, the INDE ET LIB legend with a star following the first and last word indicates that the reverse could conceivably have been a reverse G of the Connecticut Series, - not necessarily a Vermont. Therefore, I have concluded that the said Figure 9 is a primitive illustration, crude as it may be, of the recently "discovered" die combination we now call 101-G.2, of which there are three specimens known. (Ref: CNL, April 1968, P.16). This unusual Connecticut "mule" is generally recognized as being a product of the Machin's Mills mint at Newburgh, New York.



SOME COMMENTS ON THE VERMONT NOTES OF 1781

(TN-52)

- from Sanborn Partridge; Proctor, Vermont

The literature on Vermont's 1781 issue of Notes indicates, by word or picture, some variations in the text printed on those Notes, but offers no explanations. I suggest that most of the variations have sensible, simple explanations. I suggest further that a good illustration of the unique uncut sheet of Vermont 1781 Notes, which is reputed to exist, would be highly instructive.

The original Act of February, 1781, specified equal numbers of all denominations, total value authorized £25,155. The easiest way to ensure equal numbers was to simply print sheets having upon them one example of each denomination. The denominations selected were:

1 shilling	10 shillings
1 shilling 3 pence	20 shillings
2 shillings 6 pence	(called "ONE POUND" on reverse)
(called "half a crown" on reverse)	40 shillings
5 shillings	3 pounds

At £1 = 20 shillings = 240 pence, and 1 sh. = 12 d., the denominations total 139 shillings 9 pence, that is - each sheet would be 1,677 d. Now, sure enough, the authorized £25,155 converts to 6,037,200 pence and when divided by 1,677 d. comes out exactly upon a need to print 3,600 sheets!

There are two sorts of variations --- the first comes from a pure printing problem, related to the different lengths of type in such phrases as "ONE SHILLING" versus "One Shilling and Three Pence", and whether certain words took space in bold capitals or were merely set in upper and lower case as "VERMONT" versus "Vermont". Thus words are hyphenated and lines break differently for the different denominations even though the text is the same, with the exception of the denomination and the variation discussed next.

The second variation relates to the terms of the redemption payment:

- (A) For the lower denominations (1 sh; 1 sh. 3 d.; 2 sh. 6 d.; 5 sh.; and 10 sh.) payment was to be "in Silver at Six Shillings and Eight Pence per Ounce", that is by weight, 80 d. to the ounce. The obvious expectation was that small silver coins would be used, whatever was in circulation. Circulating in those times were reales from Spain, Mexico, and South America, and coins from England, Portugal, Holland, Sweden, France, etc., various Massachusetts shillings, and the fabled "bits" cut from Spanish milled dollars.

The Spanish milled dollars themselves would not have been suitable. Their "standard weight" amounted to 19/20ths ounce Troy, or 76 d. at the value of silver specified in the notes named --- too large for notes of 1 sh. (=12 d.), 1 sh. 3 d. (= 15 d.), 2 sh. 6 d. (=30 d.), or 5 sh. (=60 d.). The 10sh.(=120 d.) note turns out to be a special case discussed below.

- (B) For the higher denominations (20 sh., 40 sh., and £3) payment was to be "in Spanish mill'd Dollars, at Six Shillings each, or Gold or Silver Coins equivalent", that is by the legislated value of 72 d. to the dollar. Spanish milled silver dollars (most commonly Mexican mint) were the most prevalent trade coins of that time in North America and, even as today, had a relative value that fluctuated some in practice. Given the shifting welter of equivalences in the 1700's, we need not expect absolute precision, so it is "all right" to have a Spanish milled silver dollar apparently valued at 76 d. for the A-case and 72 d. , now, in the B-case.

In any event, at 72 d. per Spanish milled dollar, the payment provisions for the three highest value notes amounted to $3\frac{1}{3}$, $6\frac{2}{3}$, and 10 such dollars --- and evidently the authorities foresaw no unusual or practical problems for making change in the face of such fractions.

On the same basis, the 10 sh. note would have been equivalent to $1\frac{2}{3}$ Spanish milled silver dollars, and the fraction is no more awkward.

Nonetheless, the 10 sh. note was not given the B-case treatment; it was lumped instead with the A-case lower denomination notes. I have not yet discovered any explanation. Perhaps some printer's devil just wanted to leave a mystery for us numismatists of a later age to puzzle on!

Now, for a different matter --- and if plain arithmetic scares you, scan down to the end for the conclusion. Although Terrence G. Harper in 1964 reported "the actual issue was finally 24,750 pounds, 8 shillings and 7 pence" (sic), the last "7 pence" is either the misreading of an original source or a misprint, and quite impossible when the only bills with fractions of a shilling were the 1 sh. 3 d. and the 2 sh. 6 d. denominations. Either 9 d., 6 d., or 3 d. could be correct. My choice for the corrected data is 9 pence inasmuch as in olden times it was easy for a sloppy quill-pen 9 to end up like a 7.

The figure of £ 24,750/8 sh./9 d. equals 5,940,105 pence, which would have left 97,095 pence-worth unissued. Since the value of a whole sheet, 1,699 d., does not divide evenly into the 97,095, it is certain that the unissued bills had to include one or more partial sheets. While in reality low denomination notes could have been nibbled from many sheets and sold, the least complicated presumption of selling all the whole sheets possible can be quickly calculated. Thus 97,095 could have meant 57 whole sheets plus 1,506 pence-worth unissued. Stated the other way around, 171 pence-worth would have had to have been sold out of some whole sheet or sheets and this could be accounted for by selling off three 1 sh. notes, one 1 sh. 3 d. note, and one 10 sh. note (or its equivalents: two 5 sh. notes, or four 2 sh. 6 d. notes). That would not have been possible without breaking into three or more whole sheets.

If the "7 pence" should correct to 6 d., the sold off fraction becomes 168 d. . For that, a "least solution" is four 1 sh. notes and one 10 sh. note. Or if that "7 pence" should correct to 3 d., the sold-off fraction becomes 165 d. worth. For this case, a "least solution" is three 1 sh. 3 d. notes and one 10 sh. note.

Such mathematical doodling via "least solutions" suggests that the lower denominations sold better. However, this is not rigorously proven since various trade-off possibilities exist under the "least solution" framework that could overbalance that conclusion --- e.g. retaining forty 1 sh. notes while selling the balance of their sheets and selling off four 10 sh. notes while retaining the balance of their sheets.

Nonetheless, the mathematical exercise does rigorously establish that sales were not restricted to whole sheets --- in case any doubted it.

■ A BIBLIOGRAPHY ON VERMONT NOTES OF 1781 ■ ■ ■

Text of Original Act: "Bills of Credit - 1781", Appendix G, Vermont Records of the Governor and Council, 1873-1880, vol. 3, pp. 381-383. Clear reproduction facing page 382 of 20 sh. Note #2761, both sides, establishing that face design was printed "Twenty Shillings" and back design was printed "ONE POUND".

Crockett, Walter Hill, "Vermont, the Green Mountain State", vol. 2, 1921, pp. 398-390. Clear reproduction, facing p. 390, of 20 sh. Note #2761 (again! -- see other references), both sides.

Harper, Terrence G., "Historical Account of Vermont Paper Currency and Banks", Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine, March 1964, and reprinted in a limited edition of 300 copies, 48 pp. Reproduction at p.4 of 1 sh. Note #950(?), both sides, and at p.5 of 2 sh. 6 d. Note #(?), which shows that back design was printed "Half a Crown".

Hoover, Richard T., "Colonial Finances in Vermont", The Numismatist, Vol. 64, No. 1, Jan. 1951, pp. 12-19. Reproduction at p. 13 of 1 sh. Note #2612, front only; at p. 14 of 1 sh. 3 d. Note #(?), front only; at p. 15 of 2 sh. 6 d. Note #(?), both sides; at p. 16 of 5 sh. Note #1314(?), front only; at p. 17 of 10 sh. Note #20(?), front only; and at p.18 of 20 sh. Note #2136, front only.

Newman, Eric P., "The Early Paper Money of America", 1967, pp. 324-325. Clear reproduction of 2 sh. 6 d. Note #2696, both sides. (I came upon this after I had written the text of this article, and so note with interest and pleasure that Mr. Newman puts "(3600)" as the quantity figure before the line for each denomination, thus confirming my mathematics!). *

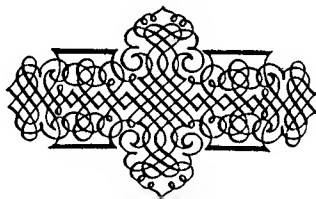
Schmall, Charles N., "Historical Note on the Colonial Coinage and Paper Money of Vermont", Numismatic Scrapbook Magazine, Vol. 12, No. 8, Aug. 1946, pp. 833-837. Clear reproduction at p. 836 of 20 sh. Note #2761 (yet again! -- see other references), front only.

Thompson, Zadock, "History of Vermont, Natural, Civil and Statistical", 1842, part 2, pp. 133-135. Clear reproduction at p. 134 of signed but unnumbered 20 sh. note.

Weissbuch, Ted N., "A Chapter in Vermont's Revolutionary War Finance", Vermont History, new series Vol. 29, No. 1, Jan. 1961, pp. 2-12. Clear reproduction of back of 2 sh. 6 d. note --- printed "Half a Crown".

Weissbuch, Ted N., and Richard T. Hooper, "Price Catalog of U.S. Colonial and Continental Currency", 1965 (one of Hewitt's Numismatic Information Series, edited by Arlie R. Slabaugh), at p. 42. Clear reproduction of 2 sh. 6 d. Note #754, front only.

- * The "References" at the end of Mr. Newman's chapter mention some of the above, and also two I have not yet seen: 1) Phillips, Jr., Henry, "Vermont Paper Money", Historical Sketches of the Paper Currency of the American Colonies (Roxbury, 1865), and 2) "Vermont Paper Money", Historical Magazine (May, 1863).



NORTH CAROLINA BRASS

(RF-55)

- from Norman G. Peters; Lancaster, New York

In an old issue of The Coin Collector's Journal (September 1876, p. 160) under the heading "Answers to Correspondance" is a very interesting reference on which I have been unable to find any other information:

"Amateur.... The piece of which you send the Editor a pencil rubbing, is a colonial coin of unknown origin, but generally denominated

"North Carolina Brass", from its having originated in North Carolina, where in the beginning of this century, it was quite common. We have had several in our possession and do not consider it worth more than 50 cents to \$1.00, according to the state of preservation. For those unfamiliar with the coins we add the description: Obverse: A small heart-shaped shield with six parallel lines across it in the center of the field, and surrounded by thirteen stars. Reverse: A ship under full sail, to the right; Brass, size 15.

Can any of our Patrons identify this "North Carolina Brass"?



IS THE "DRAPED BUST" MAILED?

(TN-53)

● from Edward R. Barnsley

This curious question arose in my mind when reading the Pine Tree Auction Company's interesting catalogue of their February, 1975 sale of some four hundred Connecticut Coppers. Certain descriptions of Draped Bust varieties refer directly to the presence of armor in their design, an observation which has not heretofore appeared in print. Examples of such references are quoted as follows: "Peculiar round contour of armor" (Lot 264), "Die failure at armor" (Lot 368), "First fleuron touches double-cut armor" (Lot 160), "Incomplete drapery and armor, lapped die" (Lot 224), and "Armor and parts of drapery reworked on die", (Lot 106).

It has been determined recently that "Buell's Draped Bust Left effigy is derived directly from his Mailed Bust Left design. The basic physiognomy of the two heads shows them to be the same whether dressed in toga or armor." (CNL, Feb.1974, P.433). It would now appear that we should, perhaps, refer to a Mailed Bust or a Draped Mailed Bust when we refer to one of the two basic obverse designs, for no one has previously identified what clothing was worn underneath the shoulder draped toga.

Crosby established in 1875 the names Mailed Bust and Draped Bust, designations which were continued by Hall and Miller and universally used today by all numismatists. However, Connecticut obverses were not always so characterized. In 1859, Dickeson stated that "The varieties of the types are determined by the punctuation of the legend, facing of the bust, or decking of the head". (NUMISMATIC MANUAL, P.102). In the type tables, under the heading "Decoration", Dickeson described the busts as being "Laureated" or "Fillet-Festooned", words which he loosely attached to both Mailed and Draped busts. Only occasionally did he refer to "bust in coat of mail, head laureated", "bust in the Roman toga, head laureated", or "bust in Roman tunic, looped upon the shoulder".

So therefore, it was Crosby - always first in his field - who became the first writer to set down in print the fundamental design differences of Connecticut obverse effigies. The Crosby tables of 1786's, 1787's and 1788's list first the Mailed Busts, and then the Draped Busts. No bust designs of 1785 are mentioned in these tables, nor are they in Miller's tables, because all coins bearing this date have only Mailed Bust obverses.

None of the early writers mentioned that the shoulder drapery of the toga, or tunic as it is alternately called, is held together at the neck by a large, ornamental brooch or fibula, to give it the Roman name. This feature is quite conspicuous on our Draped Bust obverses, and is shown in several different variations. Where the shoulder drapery divides below this fastening, the underdress is exposed, and it certainly appears to represent a neck gorget of mail with a varying number of vertical plates which generally have rounded ends, but sometimes they have straight cut terminations.

Reader reaction to the above observations will be much appreciated by the writer.



THE 1784 COUNTERFEIT ENGLISH HALFPENCE

(RF-56)

- from Norman G. Peters; Lancaster, New York

We all know that England suspended coinage of Regal coppers in 1775, thus an English copper bearing the date 1784 cannot be a legitimate British coin. Now -- where was this particular copper made? It does not resemble any known product of Machins Mills, or any of the other crude counterfeit coppers of our early state coinages, nor does it resemble any thing found among the multitude of light weight coppers that came over from the "underground" mints of London.



[enlarged]

Robert A. Vlack plates this coin and lists it as Vlack 14-84A, Rarity 8, on his excellent plates of "Early English Counterfeit Halfpence Struck in America". I know of six specimens of this variety, and have seen three of them. All had a weak date and were struck on porous planchets from rusty or pitted dies.

I am not questioning that it is of American origin, rather I am seeking any information or ideas as to where or by whom it may have been manufactured.



WHAT WAS THE COMPOSITION OF "BASE METAL" ?

(RF-57)

- from Edward R. Barnsley

We have many accounts of ingenious counterfeiters of Early American coppers using what they called "base metal", but no one, as far as I know, has ever determined exactly what specific metals comprised this undefined Eighteenth Century alloy. Let me repeat two references from Crosby concerning contemporaneous use of the term "base metal".

On July 14, 1781, the State of Pennsylvania issued a proclamation that "Divers ill-disposed persons have manufactured or imported into this State quantities of

base metal, in the similitude of British half-pence". Mr. Crosby then quotes the American State Papers as saying: "British half-pence made at the Tower, are forty-eight to the pound. Those manufactured at Birmingham, and shipped in thousands for our use, are much lighter, and they are of base metal.". The State of Connecticut was similarly concerned with this problem. In May, 1786 its Lower House passed a bill to remedy the evils resulting from such importation and circulation within the State of "Great Quantities of base and Counterfeit Copper Coin". What was the specific composition of this "base metal": what was the correct name of this metal or alloy which was, in fact, cheaper than copper itself?

Frank H. Stewart's History of the First United States Mint furnishes us proof that the federal mint produced what was called "base metal" which could well have been the same stuff used by those early counterfeiters. For example, Superintendent Harry Voight's Account Book No. 2 lists a sale on December 3, 1792 of "One hundred and fifty-two pounds of base metal at one shilling per pound, or \$20.26 for the lot". The Mint thus received 13 1/3 cents a pound for its unwanted "base metal", which may have been a byproduct reclaimed from assaying or smelting procedures. But whatever the content and source of this metal, its value was only half that of copper. One week before this sale Mint Director David Rittenhouse had signed warrant No. 31 for the purchase of 4,140 pounds of copper at 25 cents per pound.

Considerable quantities of lead were also purchased, but this metal was never used for alloying coins. Silver and copper was used to alloy gold, while copper alone was used to alloy silver. Until 1857, copper coinage of the United States contained no intentional alloy. (Ref: Robert F. Kriz, Statutory Exactitude of United States Coinage in the Numismatist, v.88, p.526). Sometimes the use of lead was specified when it was purchased, such as July 25, 1794: "Ton of pig lead for refining". Can any of our readers explain the significance of this entry?

Alloys of scrap brass were also purchased in odd lots, such as on April 4, 1793: "59 1/2 lbs. copper, cock metal, and lead". Cock metal was a specially alloyed hard brass, so-called because it was used primarily for the fabrication of the cocking or hammer mechanisms of flintlock guns as well as for stopcocks used in the distilling and plumbing industries.

There was also probably a lot of scrap brass generated in the machine shop of the Mint itself, where numerous balances, weights and gear wheels were manufactured or repaired. And all this brass had to be refined to obtain from it the pure copper required for the coining of cents and half cents, and the alloying of gold and silver ingots. So therefore, I surmise that "base metal" was simply a generic term for the unwanted byproduct of nonferrous refining furnaces, -- an alloy of undetermined composition. Do any CNL readers have thoughts along these lines?

